Soluble Fas and Fas ligand in human tear fluid after photorefractive keratectomy

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Abstract

Background/Aims—The Fas-Fas ligand system is thought to be involved in stromal cell apoptosis after corneal wounding. The aim was to measure changes in human tear fluid levels of soluble Fas (sFas) and Fas ligand (sFasL) following myopic photorefractive keratectomy (PRK).

Methods—Tear samples of 59 patients were collected preoperatively, and 1 or 2 days after PRK. Tear fluid sFas or sFasL concentrations were determined using sandwich ELISAs. Subsequently, tear flow corrected concentrations (releases) were calculated to compensate for the postoperative tear hypersecretion.

Results—The preoperative tear fluid flows (TFF) were 6.4 (1.7) µl/min (mean (SEM)) in sFas group (n = 18), and 7.5 (1.5) µl/min in sFasL group (n = 39). Postoperatively TFFs increased to 37.9 (10.9) µl/min (p = 0.003) and 58.3 (7.0) µl/min (p = 0.000), respectively. The mean preoperative sFas concentration (24.4 (11.6) U/ml) decreased to 9.7 (4.1) U/ml (p = 0.001) postoperatively, and the mean sFasL concentration (299.1 (28.8) ng/l) to 118.7 (15.9) ng/l (p = 0.000). However, the release of both substances increased significantly: sFas from 87.3 (29.4) mU/min to 229.4 (82.9) mU/min (p = 0.002) and sFasL from 1620.6 (226.4) fg/min to 4777.1 (596.1) fg/min (p = 0.000).

Conclusions—Both sFas and sFasL are normal constituents of human tears. Despite a decrease in concentrations related to reflex tears, the release of sFas and sFasL increases significantly after excimer laser photorefractive keratectomy, which suggests that they are involved in corneal healing after PRK in humans.
Materials and methods

PATIENTS
The present study was performed according to the Declaration of Helsinki, and was approved by the ethics review committee of Helsinki University Eye Hospital. Informed consent was obtained from each patient. Altogether, 59 patients who underwent PRK were included in the study. There were two groups. In sFas group there were 18 patients (seven females and 11 males). The mean age (SD) was 32.0 (9.4) years (range 18–49 years). Tear fluid was collected preoperatively (n = 18) and postoperatively on day 2 (n = 18). In the sFasL group there were 41 patients (29 females and 12 males). The mean age in this group was 31.9 (8.4) years (21–58 years). Tear fluid was collected preoperatively (n = 39) and postoperatively on day 1 or 2 (n = 31). Before operation the patients were examined carefully and showed no signs of ocular inflammation, allergy, or other ocular diseases. The patients were advised not to wear their contact lenses 2 weeks before operation.

TEAR FLUID SAMPLES
Tear fluid samples were collected with scaled 5 or 25 µl fire polished microcapillaries as previously described by van Setten et al.23 Special attention was paid not to irritate the cornea or conjunctiva. The collection time (minutes) and the volume (µl) were recorded. The tear fluid flow, TFF (µl/min), was used as an estimate of the tear secretion rate. The flow corrected concentration—that is, release, was calculated (mU/min for sFas and fg/min for sFasL) to compensate for the dilution effect caused by hypersecretion of tears after PRK. Vesaluoma et al have earlier discussed the benefits and drawbacks of this technique.23 Samples were kept frozen in −70°C until determination.

POSTOPERATIVE MEDICATION AND EYE PATCHING
Each eye was pressure patched for 2–3 days following PRK. In the morning of the first and/or second postoperative day the patch was removed and the lids were gently cleaned with a paper wipe. After waiting for about 30 seconds the tear fluid sample was collected. Then the chloramphenicol ointment (Oftan Chloro; Leiras, Tampere, Finland) was applied and the eye was repatched. The chloramphenicol ointment was used twice a day for 4 days postoperatively. The pain medication included oral diclofenac sodium 25 mg (Voltaren; Ciba-Geigy, Basle, Switzerland) and were included in the statistical analyses. The mean ablation depth was 60.9 µm (SD 21.1; range 16–104 µm). Six mm wide PRKs were performed using a Nidek EC 5000 excimer laser (Nidek, Gamagoni, Aichi, Japan) for the sFasL group. The mean ablation depth in this group was 65.7 µm (SD 32.2; range 17–113 µm).

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS
Wilcoxon’s signed rank test (the two group paired test) was used to obtain the probability (p) values to assess the significance of changes in tear fluid flow, concentration and release of various substances in tears during healing of the PRK wound. The factors measured at day 1 or 2 were compared with the preoperative level. In the results were presented as means, standard errors of mean, and ranges. p Values less than 0.05 were considered significant. All concentrations below the detection limits were expressed as the values of the detection limits and were included in the statistical analyses.

Results

SOLUBLE FAS GROUP
The TFF in the collection capillary was 6.4 (1.7) µl/min (mean (SEM); range 0.5–32.8 µl/min) preoperatively, and 37.9 (10.9) µl/min (3.8–192.3 µl/min) postoperatively (p = 0.003). All preoperative and postoperative samples contained sFas. The sFas concentration was 24.4 (11.6) U/ml (2.0–200.0 U/ml) following incubation with streptavidin peroxidase. The enzyme activity, which was in proportion to the amount of sFas in the samples, was then measured by adding a specific substrate, and by measuring the optical density of the coloured product at 450 nm.
Experimental studies have shown that apoptosis is involved in homeostasis and turnover of corneal epithelium. Shed epithelial cells may thus offer one source for sFas and sFasL in normal tear fluid.

According to Stuart et al FasL plays an important role in corneal allograft survival after transplantation. FasL in cornea would thus contribute to corneal immune privilege by inducing apoptosis in Fas containing lymphoid cells and limiting inflammatory response. Wilson et al have demonstrated that herpes simplex virus 1 (HSV-1) primary infection in cornea causes apoptotic death of anterior stromal keratocytes. The hypothesis explained that programmed cell death of anterior keratocytes prevented viral extension to the inner corneal layers.

Other potential modulators of apoptosis, such as TNF-α, IL-1α, and IL-1β, have also been determined in tear fluid earlier. Sakata et al have investigated the effect of closed eye on polymorphonuclear leucocytes (PMNs) in tear fluid. Their results showed increased recruitment, activation, and degranulation of PMNs because of closed eye environment. What the effect of postoperative pressure patching is on sFas and sFasL expression and possible leukocyte invasion in tear fluid is not yet known.

There are plenty of potential sources for these cytokines found in tears: corneal, conjunctival or inflammatory cells, main and accessory lacrimal glands, or leakage from the conjunctival vessels. Brignole et al have found Fas on normal conjunctival epithelial cells. However, FasL is not as widely expressed on conjunctival as on corneal epithelium. Whether sFas or sFasL is released in tear fluid from the lacrimal glands is not yet known.

The presence of matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs) in cornea has recently been verified, and they have been suggested to be involved in corneal wound healing. MMPs may also have a role in converting membrane bound FasL to soluble form in tear fluid or cornea.

What the possible role and significance of sFas and sFasL in normal human tear fluid is, is not yet known. Their increased release following PKR suggests influence on wound healing. Wilson et al suggested that the epithelial injury caused during excimer laser PKR treatment would result in leakage of FasL from the epithelium. Soluble FasL in human tear fluid could be one factor triggering apoptosis by interacting with membrane bound Fas receptors on the stromal keratocytes while anterior stromal keratocytes are in direct contact with tear fluid as long as an epithelial defect can be observed. On the other hand, the fact that the release of sFas increases after PRK makes the situation somewhat more complex, while sFas is known to inhibit apoptosis by interacting with soluble or membrane bound FasL. One could speculate the existence of an equilibrium between these molecules, which would result in modulation of cellular events during wound healing. On the basis of current information we hypothesize that increased release of sFas and sFasL in human tear fluid is

**Discussion**

The results of the present study show that sFas and sFasL are normal constituents of human tear fluid. Their releases increase significantly after excimer laser PRK.
an indicator of outgoing wound healing process and may even modulate the outcome of excimer laser PRK. An alternative possibility is that the presence of sFas and sFasL in tears, showing substantial interindividual variation, is resulting from normal cell turnover, and that the increases of these substances in tear fluid after PRK just reflects increased cell death.

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